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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001314

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN; COMMERCE FOR EHOUSE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2019

TAGS: ETRD PREL TI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: TAJIKISTAN INTENDS TO INCREASE
AMOUNT OF TRADE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (U) President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rakhmon, was in Turkmenbashi and Avaza on October 9-10 for a working visit with Turkmen President Berdimuhamedov. Turkmen state-run newspapers described the visit as building relations between the two "brotherly" neighbors, especially in the areas of trade, energy, transportation, construction, tourism, education, science, and culture. They reported that the presidents also talked about regional issues, including hydroelectric resources and security in Afghanistan.

¶2. (SBU) A contact at the Embassy of Tajikistan, Nazirmad Aliev, told Poloff that Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have no political disagreements, so there was really nothing to discuss on that front. Aliev also described Tajiks and Turkmen as so closely related that when Turkmen find out where he is from they say, "Oh, you're one of ours." The two presidents signed a whole series of agreements that were general in nature, including one on the work of the ministries of Foreign Affairs, and one on bilateral commissions for culture, education, and sports. The agreements only provide a base for future joint work and update agreements from the late 1990s.

¶3. (C) According to Aliev, the Tajikistan Government was most interested in increasing the volume of trade between the two countries. He said that trade between the two countries amounts to \$80 million a year now, but has increased three times in the past two years. He credited this to the frequent presidential visits. President Rakhmon came to Turkmenistan for former president Niyazov's funeral and Berdimuhamedov's inauguration. Since then the Tajikistani president has made an official visit and this working visit to Turkmenistan, and Rakhmon invited Berdimuhamedov to Dushanbe in 2010. The two presidents also met on the margins of the UNGA in September in New York. Aliev mentioned that the two presidents discussed opening direct flights between Dushanbe and Ashgabat.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: The Turkmen and Tajik Governments' differing commentary on Rakhmon's visit shows that Turkmenistan is

currently focusing on bolstering its image as a regional leader whereas Tajikistan is attempting to develop its economy. Nevertheless, both countries portrayed the presidential visit positively and seem to desire stronger ties. However, they need to solve problem areas, such as how to divide regional water resources and how to facilitate travel between the two countries, before they can truthfully say they see eye-to-eye politically. END COMMENT.

CURRAN